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MEXICO FOR POL, USAID, RSO

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TAGS: [AMGT](#) [AMED](#) [CASC](#) [TBIO](#) [ASEC](#) [KFLU](#) [KSAF](#) [KSEO](#) [KPAO](#)

SUBJECT: SPIKE IN H1N1 INFLUENZA CASES IN YUCATAN RAISES MILD
CRITICISM ABOUT LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

¶1. (U) Summary: Confirmed cases of H1N1 in the State of Yucatan are increasing but the public remains largely unconcerned. Some local officials speculate that the rise in cases is due to respiratory problems caused by seasonal rains. Others argue that lax testing methods concealed the true number of cases until recently. End Summary.

¶2. (U) To date, the State of Yucatan has registered 1,976 cases of Type A H1N1 Influenza, with 53 persons currently hospitalized. The State has the second highest rate of infection after Mexico City, which has registered 2,142 cases. Chiapas follows in third place with 1,777 registered cases. There have been eight confirmed deaths in the State of Yucatan attributed to the virus. Yucatan Secretary of Health Dr. Alvaro Quijano-Vivas attributes the increase in cases to seasonal climatic changes, in particular recent heavy rains, which are causing respiratory problems in the general population, and to the fact that a new laboratory facility, inaugurated two weeks ago greatly expanded the capacity of the State to test and detect the H1N1 strain. During the first ten days that the laboratory was open, 360 new cases were diagnosed.

¶3. (U) Local authorities have received mild criticism in recent days for under-reporting actual cases and only testing the very ill for the possibility of H1N1. Local media reported that Dr. Miguel Gamboa-Gamboa, Head of Infectious Diseases at the Clinica de Merida, estimated that the total number of cases could be three times that reported by State officials. In a subsequent conversation with Merida's Principal Officer, Dr. Gamboa backed down from his statements reported in the media and echoed the Secretary of Health's opinion that the increase was seasonal. The Governor's office was silent until yesterday, when she finally spoke to the press and reinforced the Health Secretary's recommendations for preventing the spread of influenza: washing hands frequently, not touching your face, and seeing a doctor instead of self-medicating if ill.

¶4. (U) Comment: The local population appears largely unconcerned about the virus, even though some schools closed out the year earlier than anticipated due to a large numbers of students with cold and flu-like symptoms. The "social distancing" restrictions in place during the height of the crisis are not currently in place and the impact on tourism is negligible. Although the State Secretary of Health says they are continuing with their campaign of prevention, they admit that the rise in cases is in part due to a lack of concern and attention within the local population, which could be addressed by a more aggressive public campaign. End comment.

